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SUBJECT: ASSISTANCE TO RETURNING LABORERS IN SOUTHWEST CHINA'S
POOREST PROVINCE

REF: A. CHENGDU 36 B. CHENGDU 267

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11. (U) This cable contains sensitive but unclassified
information - not for distribution on the internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY. Authorities in southwest China's Guizhou
province have set up booths at the capital city's train station
to assist the thousands of migrant laborers who are returning
home after losing jobs in coastal factories. Although the
booths appear to have the potential to serve as useful
information conduits, we observed relatively low worker interest
in their services during our recent visit. More than one
million migrant laborers are projected to return to Guizhou, a
figure that greatly exceeds the usual flow of returning workers
at this time of year. END SUMMARY.

Government Support for Returning Laborers

13. (SBU) During a late December trip to Guiyang, the capital of
Guizhou province, Congenoff visited the city's train station to
observe both the number of passengers arriving from coastal
Guangzhou province and the government assistance provided to
returning migrant laborers. Roughly six million of Guizhou's 40
million residents work outside the province, according to
Guizhou statistics. The province in 2006 was also China's
poorest, with an average per capita income of only USD 736 per
year. Its economy depends heavily on remittances from migrant
laborers working outside the province. Recent local press
reports have suggested that Guiyang is particularly hard-hit by
a returning wave of migrant workers who have lost their jobs in
coastal factories. A late November report in the Farmer's Daily
said that roughly 10,000 workers were returning to Guizhou every
day, and a total of 1.2 million were expected to return by the
end of the year.

14. (SBU) Wang Mingzeng, the Deputy Director of the Guizhou Labor
and Social Security Bureau (GLSSB), told us that migrant
laborers are returning from Southeast China at a rate of about
1,000 workers per day. Based on the number of workers projected
to return, however, the laborers may actually be returning a
rate of about 10,000 per day. According to Guizhou government

statistics, about 397,600 migrant laborers returned to Guizhou between October and late November. More than 600,000 additional laborers are expected to return before the start of the Spring Festival. In an ordinary year, 600,000 is roughly equal to the total number of workers that return to Guizhou for the holiday, according to Wang. The GLSSB conducted a survey in Guizhou that indicated slightly more than 41 percent of the workers returning this year have come home after the coastal factory that employed them closed or cut salaries as orders for their products declined. While not related to job losses, the second greatest reason for workers gave for returning home earlier than normal this year - cited by about 33 percent of those surveyed - was the desire to avoid potentially inclement weather like that seen before the last Spring Festival.

15. (SBU) At the train station, we noticed that the GLSSB had a large assistance booth located directly outside the area where passengers exit the station. We also observed aid stations down the street at the long-distance bus terminal and at a nearby police post. Two police vans parked near the train station displayed banners indicating they were "service vehicles" for returning laborers. The large booth located outside the station exit had a sign that read "Guiyang City Labor and Social Security Bureau Help and Support for Returning Migrant Laborers Reception Point."

16. (SBU) This booth may be set up and staffed only during times when trains arrive from Guangdong and other origination points for returning migrant laborers. We did not see the booth during our first visit to the train station when no trains from the coast were scheduled to arrive. On our second visit when two trains from Guangdong arrived, the booth was staffed with about five employees. The assistance booth at the long distance bus

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station appeared to have only one person manning it.

17. (SBU) Outside the station's passenger exit, the reception booth had a number of pamphlets and information sheets available for returning workers. One pamphlet titled "Guiyang city employment and re-employment" included information on how to apply for employment assistance, as well as the addresses and phone numbers for district and county-level employment centers. Returning workers also had the opportunity to register to receive additional job training and employment information from the Labor Bureau. We observed the staff at the booth answering workers' questions.

Low Worker Interest for Support Services

18. (SBU) Despite the prominent position of the assistance booths, the vast majority of apparent returning migrant laborers did not seek assistance. We observed roughly 10 - 15 individuals approach the booth and look at the printed information or speak with the staff. Of the visitors, many seemed to approach the booth out of curiosity and only a few took any of the print materials with them. The few who did have specific questions about job training or employment received answers quickly and left. The registration form for workers to request additional information had only two names written on it for the day of our visit. Workers who live in towns and villages outside the provincial capital were directed to seek employment assistance from their local labor bureau. We did not see anyone approach either the police assistance booth or the

booth at the long distance bus terminal.

¶9. (SBU) Nearly all of the returning passengers we saw quickly made their way out of the train station to either the local or long distance bus terminals. This tracks with what we heard from our Guiyang-based contacts; most laborers will leave the train station directly for their hometown unless they have relatives living in Guiyang. There was a sizeable police presence at the station, although it is not clear if there were more police than normal for this time of the year.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: When we spoke with an academic with the Guizhou Academy of Agricultural Sciences and a few NGO contacts in Guizhou, they were universally skeptical that the Labor Bureau's reception booth at the train station provided useful services to farmers. One NGO contact told us that the booths did nothing more than provide workers with a glass of water, in contrast to what we saw during our second visit to the train station.
BOUGHNER